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MEMOIR

OF

CAPTAIN NATHAN HALE.

Thus, while fond Virtue wished in vain to save,
HALE, bright and generous, found a hapless grave;
With Genius' living flame his bosom glowed,
And Science charmed him to her sweet abode;
In Worth's fair path his feet adventured far,
The pride of Peace, the rising hope of War;
In duty firm, in danger calm as even,—
To friends unchanging, and sincere to Heaven.
How short his course, the prize how early won,
While weeping Friendship mourns her favorite gone!

Pres. Dwight's Conquest of Canaan, Book I.

FOR THE HALE MONUMENT ASSOCIATION.

NEW HAVEN.
PRINTED BY S. BABCOCK.

1844.

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James Stanton Babcock

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MEMOIR

OF

CAPTAIN NATHAN HALE.

Captain Nathan Hale, one of the first and noblest self-martyrs of the American Revolution, was born in the town of Coventry, Conn., on the 6th day of June, 1755; the sixth of nine sons. Of a warm, yet sober temperament, and a strong and thoughtful mind, his early youth gave promise of greatness, and it was carefully trained by pious and liberal parents. After gaining the best academical education which the country then afforded, he entered Yale College, and graduated at the early age of eighteen, with the highest honors as a scholar, and the no less high character as a man—the favorite both of his class-mates and teachers.

With high aims and aspirations, he was early distinguished for a heroic devotion to free principles and his country. His infancy was nursed, and his manhood fed, in the very air of freedom. Its spirit he had drank in from the maternal breast. He had felt it around the light and love of his own hearth-side; heard it from the seat where he went up to pray. It had lived with him a companion of health and joy in his daily duties; it had come a visitant of purity and loveliness to his young dreams. He had caught it all amid the scenery of a romantic home—by the hills and streams, the woods and meadows—in the skies and winds of his own green land. He had learned to commune with it, not only in the visions and voices of nature, and in the sublime teachings of revelation, but among classic halls, from the classic pages of Freedom's "Elder Born;" till that spirit became the star of his hope, the ideal of his worship, and he followed it with his whole soul.

But a field was now opening wherein that devotion was to be tried. The sound of war had gone up from the plains of Lexington, and the echo rang like a wakening summons through the length and breadth of the land. 'T was the distant roar of the fast coming storm. The blow had fallen, the sword had been drawn and reddened, and there was no longer hope of peace or reconciliation. The calm tempered, yet strong hearted New Englanders, saw the threatening and made ready to meet it like men. The face of society was in a moment changed. The farmer left his plough in the furrow, the mechanic dropped the utensil of his craft from his hand; even the clergyman, in some cases, closed the sacred book on his pulpit desk, and dismissed his startled hearers;—and one and all harnessed them for the fight, and hurried away to the scene of conflict. Then went forth the old, the middle aged, and the young; their hearts beat high, and swelled with one enthusiasm; they *all* felt young. Every town and village, almost every private dwelling, resounded with the clank of arms, and the bustle of preparation. The ways were seen crowded with moving masses, pressing and pouring onward to breast the front of danger. Then was shown the might of woman, as well as the valor of man—of woman, so tender in her gentleness and her love, yet so strong in the trying hour. The mother, the wife, the sister—the beloved, the betrothed one, gave up all they held dearest, those to whom their hearts were clinging—gave them up in sadness and submission, and held their tears to weep in the agony of lonely and anxious bereavement.

Foremost among these brave men, was young Hale. His native land was bleeding: her rights had been outraged; her liberty trampled under foot. He could not bear the sight without lifting his arm in her behalf. No cause could be greater, or holier, and no worldly interest, or peril, or dissuasion—not the privilege of the sacred profession which he appears to have adopted, could withhold him from espousing it.

After leaving college, he had been engaged in teaching an academy at New London, with great success and popularity. There are persons yet living, who well recollect his mild and winning mode of instruction, gaining at once the confidence and attachment of both parents and pupils. His modest yet manly deportment, his singularly frank and sincere manners, free from shadow of deception or disguise. His happy art of imparting right views and feelings to his inferiors; the power and charm of his conversation, which made him the favorite of both sexes—of the old and the young, in every domestic or social circle. Withal, his remarkably expressive features, the very mirror of his heart, brightening up at every new emotion, with a glow and an earnestness that none who had once seen could ever forget.

When the first news of the battle of Lexington reached New London, it was at evening. A town-meeting was forthwith called, and a few old veterans, then boys, who were present, still remember with what energy and eloquence the young scholar stood forth and addressed the assembly. "Let us march," said the speaker, with an emphasis that thrilled every heart to his own enthusiasm, "Let us march *immediately*, and never lay down our arms *till we have obtained our independence*." A bold speech, even a bold *thought*, for that time; but one which the thoughtful scholar had probably been long meditating. Accordingly, among other spirited and patriotic "Resolutions," it was determined that Captain Coit's company, (the only regular one in the place,) should set out the *next morning;* and young Hale requested, and was allowed to join them as a volunteer. He thereupon dismissed his school next day; made his pupils an affectionate farewell, and took leave. The summer, it appears, he spent between the army around Boston and his own state, in raising volunteers, and making other preparations. Early in the fall, (1775,) he received a Lieutenant's commission in Col. Charles Webb's regiment, and before the close of the year, a Captain's. The battle of Bunker's Hill had been fought, and the British

forces still held Boston, while the American troops beseiged them on all sides save the water,—from Dorchester, Roxbury, Winter Hill, and the neighboring heights. The post of Captain Hale's company was one of the most exposed and dangerous, so that even his private friends complained that his *new* soldiers should occupy a place that belonged by duty to older ones: but the post of danger was the one he had chosen, and he kept it. While stationed here, a small incident occurred which shows the nobleness of his nature. He had gone, one day, to the quarters of General Lee, whom he found very much disquieted at the discontent which reigned through the army. And even that veteran caught some new encouragement from the ardor of the youthful officer, whom he knew and respected. The volunteers, undisciplined and disappointed, poorly provided and more poorly paid, were all murmuring; many leaving, and more still attempting to leave. And the officers found that most would return home before the militia could come in, or the enemy be driven from his hold. In this extremity, Capt. Hale promised his company his own wages, to induce them to stay, and actually, at last, borrowed money from a friend on the credit of his own *advance* pay, to supply their wants, and satisfy their somewhat just complaints. Meanwhile he had been indefatigable in acquiring military tactics and skill, and therein disciplining his soldiers.

In the opening of the spring of 1776, the British evacuated Boston, and sailed for Nova Scotia, where they were to receive a powerful reinforcement from England, and thence make a descent on New-York.

Suspecting this plan, the American commander had despatched Gen. Lee, even before their departure, to put the city and Long Island in a state of defense; and thither the whole army, breaking up their camp at Boston, marched soon afterwards. Early in the summer, Gen. Washington had formed a *select regiment* from the army for special service, and gave the command to the brave Col. Knowlton, of Mansfield. Capt. Hale's company was one. The young officer had drawn the

attention of the Commander-in-Chief, by his uncommon abilities. One who at this time knew him well, calls him "one of the most accomplished officers of his rank and age in the army." Another incident, which happened at this period, will show that this high estimate of his character, was by no means overrated. Our troops were still wretchedly supplied with even the necessaries of life—things without which the warmest zeal can not long endure. There was much suffering and much repining. A British sloop, laden with provisions, was lying in the East river, under cover of the ship Asia, man-of-war with 90 guns.

Capt. Hale formed the bold project of capturing this sloop, and bringing her into the harbor of New-York. He soon found hardy compeers for the enterprise. At dead of night the little band of adventurers rowed silently, in a small boat, to a point near the sloop, and there waited for the moon to go down. As soon as it was dark, and all still, save the watchman's voice from the deck of the Asia, they darted upon their prey, sprang aboard, hoisted sail, and brought her into port with the British tars in the hold, and without the loss of a man. This exploit was loudly applauded, and the daring leader distributed the goods of his prize to feed and clothe the hungry and naked soldiers.

But the reinforcement had been received, and a powerful armament of some 25,000 English and Hanoverian forces, so long threatened and expected, was now at hand, to prove their boast and wreak their vengeance in putting down the rebels! The following are brief and hasty minutes from Capt. Hale's diary, in his own words:—"Aug. 21st, (1776,) Wed.—Heavy storm at night. Much thunder. Capt. Van Wyck, a Lieut., and an Ensign of Col. McDougal's Regt., killed by a shock [of lightning.] Likewise one man in town, [N. Y.,] belonging to a militia regt. of Ct. The storm continued for two or three hours, for the greater part of which time [there] was a perpetual lightning, and the sharpest I ever knew."

It would almost seem that the fiery strife of the elements *above*, and four victims to its fury, was but ominous of another strife *below*, so soon to follow, and far more numerous victims so soon to fall! Mark the next entry, the very *next day*.

"Aug. 22nd, Thursd. The enemy landed some troops down at the Narrows on L. Island. Aug. 23rd, Friday. Enemy landed *more* troops—news that they had marched up and taken station near Flatbush—their advanced guard being on this side, near the wood—that some of our riflemen attacked and drove them back $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile."

Here the minutes break off, and the diary closes. They were the last which the writer ever traced there! The hand that penned had other too urgent business for even such brief notes. Three days from this last date, on the 27th of August, was fought the bloody and disastrous battle of Flatbush—a day long to be remembered and regretted in American annals, the details of which can not be given here. Our troops, many of them raw and inexperienced, outflanked, surrounded, and borne down by overwhelming numbers of veterans, gave way at last, after desperate fighting and dreadful slaughter. What American heart that hath heard, has not wept over the fate of Gen. Lord Sterling's regiment! Composed chiefly of young men, the flower of our army, they bore, by their position, the brunt of nearly the whole battle, and were cut off almost to a man. Charging with most obstinate bravery, an immensely superior force, and breaking their line, they kept them engaged till their compatriots had passed through and escaped; then, and not till then, the handfull remaining surrendered; thus saving the sacrifice of nearly the whole army by their own! In this terrible engagement, it seems, Capt. Hale's company took part. From the result of the battle, the Commander-in-Chief saw a retreat across to the main land was absolutely necessary to save the army, now our last stay, our forlorn hope. The masterly skill and complete success with which this manœuvre was made, reflect no less praise on our great chieftain than any of his most brilliant exploits

in the field. Providence, too, seemed to smile upon the attempt. A thick fog hung over the island, completely hiding the movements of the Americans, while before them the city lay in clear sunshine. The foe was thus kept totally ignorant till the prey was safe beyond his grasp.

But this defeat was a heavy blow. It disheartened the army, and cast a gloom over the people. It was a doubtful, an awful crisis. The "Declaration" had just gone forth. A nation, strong in justice, strong in spirit, but weak in numbers and means, goaded by wrongs beyond the point of human endurance, had risen up to assert and defend her dearest rights —had uttered her defiance against the proudest and mightiest of nations. She had just boldly and solemnly, through her Representatives, convened in sober council, spoken that fearfully responsible word—the word of separation, of rebellion. In the face of heaven, and before the audience of mankind, calmly and deliberately had she spoken it, "INDEPENDENCE"! Another Rubicon was passed, but for a far different purpose than of old, and a political gulf forever drawn between the two nations. The first great struggle to support that high resolve had failed! The dejected and half supplied soldiers, as fast as their enlistments expired, were leaving by companies. The army, the safeguard of our national existence, was fast dwindling away, and the people looked on with visage troubled and foreboding! The British commander, haughty by victory, yet deigning to show his magnanimity, used all his delegated authority and late success to reclaim or overawe the revolted colonists; proclaiming full pardon to all who would *now* accept it, and threatening the most terrible penalties to every recusant. The hearts of many failed them, and they went over,—even, afterwards, two members of Congress itself. This was the beginning of that "hour which tried men's souls"—the darkest in our country's history. May she never see a darker!

Washington was now compelled to adopt his Fabian system of warfare, of caution and vigilance. To weary and worry

out his foe, rather than fight him in the open field—a system which, in the end, proved so successful. He saw that all was now at stake. The fate of his country was hanging on a hair. That fearful juncture was come, "the turning point," or "tide in the affairs" of nations, which all must pass through—the moment when the nation's Guardian Genius may be supposed put to his sorest need, from the Adversary.

Expecting every day an assault from the enemy, Washington was anxious to learn their strength and disposition by inspecting their camp. But by what possible means? Who was able, or who would venture a mission so critical and hazardous? He applied to Col. Knowlton, who laid the proposal before his officers. None came forward. All shrunk from a path so full of difficulty and danger, and so scant of reward, either of gain or glory. At last, solicitation was made to Capt. Hale. The confidant of the Commander-in-Chief, the darling of the soldiery, and the ornament of the army, gladly would they have spared him, had another been found to fill the place. He accepted the rejected and perilous trust. He had just recovered, weak and worn, from a severe illness. His friends used all their influence to dissuade his going. They represented the hazard of the undertaking in the strongest light; they remonstrated, they entreated his declining it. Among others, Capt. Wm. Hull, his intimate, at that time a young officer of promise, afterwards of such unfortunate notoriety as a General and Governor of Michigan. The timid, self-serving wisdom of the one, and the lofty, disinterested heroism of the other, is here shown forth, the index of their character, and pointing out their future career. How different! Hull surrendered his country to save *his* life; Hale surrendered *his* life to save his country.

All dissuading and discouragements were disregarded. It is said that application was made, after many others, to a sergeant who had served in the French war. He promptly refused, saying, that "*he was ready to fight the British at any place or time*, but he, for one, *did not feel willing to go among*

them to be hung up like a dog !" Capt. Hale stood by and said, "*I* will undertake the business." He had, perhaps, modestly waited for some one else, till he saw none such could be found. Then his generous and noble soul arose ;—the generous spirit which is *then* most ready to choose the high path of duty when hardest, and by all others forsaken ;—the noble, which rises in its strength to the magnitude of its arduous and perilous task. A higher motive than any mere earthly consideration, than private affection, personal interest, or public honor, prompted him on. That motive was no narrow or selfish one. It was the common good of all—his country. She appeared reduced to the last gasp ; her spirit was broken and fainting ; her banner had been stricken down ; her first young war cry of freedom seemed fast sinking in the tempest of foes now gathering darkly and fiercely around her ! Her great leader saw the danger ; he called, he besought, he *could* not *command*, some one to risk his own safety for hers. And an offering, a *single* one, was ready at that call.

Young Hale had eminent abilities for so nice and responsible a duty. Ardent in heart, yet cool of head—bold, but prudent—and his frank nature and open countenance, while they made him incapable of deceit, would render him, also, least liable to suspicion. Shifting his military dress for a plain one, and attended by a confidential friend, he set out from the camp at Harlem Heights, intending to pass directly over to the enemy's lines on Long Island. But no means of crossing could be found till he reached Norwalk, in Connecticut, some fifty miles above New York. Here he obtained an American armed sloop to convey him across. Just before starting, he is said to have handed his watch to his friend to keep until his return ; but immediately recollecting himself, took it again, declaring he would risk his *watch* where he would risk his *life*. He landed at Huntington, (L. I.,) and went through all the enemy's lines, making a careful and exact survey of their posts, defences, order, and numbers. Meanwhile, a part of their army had crossed over and taken New York ; the Amer-

ican troops being forced to retire to Harlem Heights, about five miles north of the city. In a severe skirmish which took place there, the gallant Col. Knowlton was killed, but the British were repulsed.

After fully completing his charge, Capt. Hale had passed in safety over to the city, escaped the vigilance of all the sentries, and was just passing the last picquet guard between the lines of the two armies, and not more than two or three miles from his own quarters, when he was arrested. The place was a tavern stand, then called "The Cedars." When taken and examined, it is said that he candidly acknowledged his mission, and that, on being searched, the drawings of the works and camp, with *descriptions written in Latin*, were found between the soles of the pumps which he wore. Many have reported that he was betrayed by a relative, a cousin—a tory and deserter. That he had such a relative,—that he was then in the British army, is certain. But that he added to the guilt of betraying his country, the enormity of betraying a kinsman, whose hospitality and kindness he had often before received, is not so clear, and for the honor of human nature we would hope, not true. Different, too, are the accounts respecting the spot where he was taken, as well as the manner of his death. Some have said the place was Brooklyn, (L. I.,) and others, that he was hung up *immediately*. In one point, however, all agree, that death was inflicted with the most unfeeling cruelty, and suffered with the manliest fortitude. The more probable account is the one given, and the following. It appears he was arrested near night, and taken or reported to Sir Wm. Howe, the British commander, who ordered him to be *hung next morning!*

It was the 22d day of September, 1776. The sun had hardly risen, when the young patriot is led forth to suffer. Every consolation is denied him,—a bible, a clergyman. No sympathy is shown,—not a friendly eye is around him to cheer,—not a kind hand is by him to soothe this last bitter moment. Yet he stands firm and collected. Man has forsa-

ken, yet he has looked with his spirit to heaven, and thence gained strength and peace. He falls for a glorious cause, a cause which now seems expiring, but which heaven shall yet prosper. The cause which his young soul had so nobly chosen, and his manly arm so well defended; for which he had been willing to hazard all, and is now prepared to suffer all. He had just finished a letter, the last messenger to his unconscious kindred, the loved to whom his spirit on the threshhold of eternity is yearning, to whom it looks back to give a tender recognition, one fond farewell, ere it departs to return no more! But that sad, consoling messenger, shall never find them—never meet those mournful eyes, nor assuage those wounded and bleeding hearts. The savage hangman, a traitor and refugee, snatches at it, glances over it, and tears it in pieces, for the reason, as afterwards given, "*that the rebels should never know they had a man who could die with such firmness!*"

The victim is now hurried to the fatal tree, the rope is adjusted, and the last aspiration is breathing from his lips—words nobler than which man never uttered,—"*My country, would I had another life to give thee!*" The work is done, and the spirit hath passed away in the fullness of that one earnest, passionate regret!

Thus fell, in the spring-time of his years, the patriot and martyr, the self-devoted, Capt. Nathan Hale, little more than twenty-one years of age. His race was brief but glorious. From the calm and chosen walks of learning, he had hastened at the first call of his native land, to the fields of warfare.

With no less shining talents there than he had displayed in a different sphere, he began a career of the highest promise. What might it not have reached! but how soon was it to be ended! He had drawn the sword for his country in her earliest wrongs. He had struggled for her, faithfully and fearlessly, in her gloomiest hour. He never lived to see the glories of her brighter day. Never lived to reap the meed of a wider and higher name, which he had earned so well, and

had else so surely won. A *higher* name did we say? Yes, a higher, it may be—higher for others, for the world which measures so blindly, and often so unjustly, the merit of actions by their success, not by their motive, not by their disinterestedness,—but hardly higher for *himself*. What higher sacrifice could he have given than his own person? No offering were more pure, more exalted, more *unselfish*—he could have done no more. Truly hath a divine voice said: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." *His* friends were his country—his country and all she held; and that country at her utmost need.

Such sacrifices have ever been rare, and they who made them, have, in all ages, been looked upon as among the exalted models of human kind. They have worn the thorny wreath but to win the starry crown. To do and to bear all that can be done or borne for our fellow-men; for their weal, for their safety, whether in toil or sacrifice, is indeed the height of mortal nobleness. Well did ancient Rome prize her Horatii, her Curtius, her Decius, and her Regulus, with her proudest names. Carthage, also, could boast her two Phileni: Sparta her Leonidas, and Athens her Themistocles. Nor have more modern times been wanting in such names. Italy may be proud of her Rienzi, and Switzerland of her Arnold Struthan; France of her Joan d'Arc and "six citizens" of Calais; Scotland of her Wallace, and England of her Hampden, and Russel, and Sidney—heroic minds, who, in one way or another, laid down their lives, not in ambition, not for power or a throne, but for their country—for all mankind. Minds who could coolly and calmly forego all the *present*, and look forward to the *future* for their reward—to that bright reversion beyond the grave! And though few, *very* few such have been in any age—in *all* ages, yet well for fallen and suffering humanity, well for *us*, that *some* such *have been*, else the world had found no salvation.

Historians have been fond of comparing the fate of Hale with the fate of Andre. Many features in their character and

destiny were strikingly similar. Indeed, the means used, and the manner of arrest of the two adventurers were so alike, that only *priority* and *authenticity* might save from doubt some facts in the history of the former; and nothing but an equal authenticity and the coincidence of like purposes, in similar situations, producing like results, could save that of the latter from wonder, or suspected imitation. Both were young, brave, accomplished, and devoted in their country's cause: both were the favorites of their respective armies: both undertook a like dangerous enterprise: both had almost accomplished it: both when taken frankly confessed their missions, and both met the same end with a kindred heroism. But here the parallel breaks. Many and important traits are wanting to finish it. The two did *not* undertake their tasks from the same motives, with similar facilities, nor with like prospects of success. Andre had set out from the victorious and confident party, under promise of great rewards and honors; *above all*, with the secret connivance and previous well planned arrangement of the American traitor General; one who had great power and influence, and stretched them all to pave and secure the way. This has been too much forgotten. Hale went forth among an overwhelming force, haughty by late success, and breathing nothing but vengeance against the newly risen "Rebels," as they disdainfully called the colonists—at a time, ere defeat had humbled the one feeling, or tempered the other with a touch of mercy. He went forth *alone*, with none to rely upon except himself, his God, and his cause, from no expectation of recompense or fame, but *against* both. He went forth amid some of his own misguided and renegade countrymen, whose watchfulness would be keener to detect, their hatred and slavishness more bitter to punish, than even the enemy themselves.

Again, the circumstances of their death were widely different. Andre was regularly and fairly tried before a court-martial of the most distinguished American officers, over which the generous Greene, second only to Washington, pre-

sided. His sentence was delayed with all the indulgence, and executed, at last, with all the sympathy possible—more than many thought proper. Every favor to satisfy and assuage was cheerfully granted. The hearts of his enemy, of the Commander-in-Chief, wept over his hearse, and their hands paid respect to his burial. How sadly the reverse was the treatment of Hale. No favor was shown him; no kind look or comforting word was given, nothing of what every human heart must need in its final and trying agony. The consolations of religion were refused, even his letter destroyed, as if it had been *determined* that oblivion should for ever rest over his fate. He was executed, or rather murdered, privately and ignominiously, with every mark of insult and barbarity which haughty and heartless power could command, or cowardly and ferocious underlings inflict—hung by a base, brutal ruffian, a traitor and refugee; a miscreant, who, having disowned his country, was probably allowed this office, to strike additional terror into his countrymen—to show his new fealty, and vent his malicious spite. But lastly, and not least, how different the honors to their memory! The ashes of Andre have been reclaimed by his native land, and enshrined beneath a costly mausoleum in the hallowed spot of her proudest sepulchres; and there they are *now* resting in her bosom, side by side with her mightiest sons, beneath the time-honored aisles of Westminster Abbey.

No stone, no memorial—not a single identifying token, marks the lonely grave of Hale. The fatal tree has been cut away, the ground desecrated, the spot long lost. Years of cultivated verdure may have grown above it—years of human habitations may have covered it—none can tell. The footsteps of thoughtless men trample it day by day: the rains and dews descend, and the winds of heaven go over, but reveal not the resting place of the departed hero. His ashes are hidden or scattered, never to be collected by any affectionate hand, and have left but the one consoling reflection, that the soil of freedom holds them,—the soil for which he lived and died.

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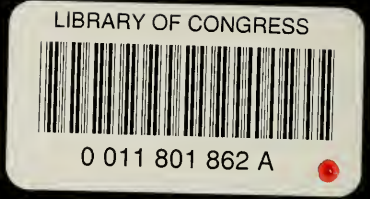
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